

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1143

INFO AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

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WASHINGTON PASS AGRICULTURE

ROME PASS FODAG AND JOHN WEIDERT

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SUBJECT: VISIT OF SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TO SYRIA

REF: DAMASCUS 2527

1. THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND MATERIAL WAS PREPARED FOR USE
IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE'S VISIT TO
SYRIA.

2. AGRICULTURE IN SYRIA: IN RECENT YEARS, AGRICULTURE GEN-
ERATED ALMOST ONE QUARTER OF SYRIA'S GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
(GDP), ESTIMATED AT \$1.9 BILLION IN 1972, AND WHICH INCREASED
AT AN ANNUAL COMPOUND RATE OF 6 PERCENT BETWEEN 1964-71 AND
OVER 11 PERCENT IN 1972. AGRICULTURE CONTRIBUTES ABOUT TWO-
THIRDS OF EXPORT PROCEEDS. NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF DIRECT
EMPLOYMENT OF EXPORT PROCEEDS. NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF DIRECT

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EMPLOYMENT WERE IN AGRICULTURE, IN ADDITION TO A SUBSTANTIAL

NUMBER OF WORKERS EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRIES PROCESSING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. HOWEVER, THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION DURING THE SIXTIES, AT ONLY 2.4 PERCENT PER ANNUM, DID NOT KEEP PACE WITH THE INCREASE IN ACTIVE POPULATION, AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE INCREASED. LOWER CROP HARVEST AND WAR DAMAGE IN 1973 SLOWED GDP GROWTH, BUT INFLOW OF \$700 MILLION IN 1973-74 FROM ARAB SOURCES, NEW BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CREDITS, SIZEABLE GROWTH IN PETROLEUM SALE AND TRANSIT RECEIPTS, AND 1973 LIBERALIZATION OF FINANCIAL AND TRADE CONTROLS HAVE PUT THE ECONOMY ON A BOOM FOOTING. WHILE AGRICULTURE'S SHARE OF GDP HAS DROPPED OVER PAST YEARS WITH CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN INDUSTRIAL SHARE, MUCH OF THE LATTER'S GROWTH IS AGRO-RELATED.

THE COUNTRY'S UNEXPLOITED POTENTIAL FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS SUBSTANTIAL, PARTICULARLY THROUGH IRRIGATION. OUT OF A TOTAL OF SOME 6 MILLION HECTARES OF CULTIVATED LAND ONLY 500,000 HECTARES ARE IRRIGATED, 40 PERCENT OF WHICH IS IN COTTON. PRODUCTION IN RAINFED LANDS--MAINLY WHEAT, BARLEY, LENTILS AND CHICKPEAS, OLIVES, GRAPES AND FIGS, VEGETABLES AND SHEEP--FLUCTUATES WIDELY FROM YEAR TO YEAR BECAUSE OF VARIATIONS IN ANNUAL RAINFALL. TOBACCO IS CULTIVATED BY NEARLY 70,000 FARMERS ON ABOUT 13,000 HECTARES. ANIMAL PRODUCTION IS CONCENTRATED IN SHEEP AND GOAT RAISING, WITH PRODUCTION OF DAIRY AND POULTRY PRODUCTS, ALTHOUGH EXPANDING, INSUFFICIENT TO MEET DOMESTIC REQUIREMENTS. THE WATERS OF THE EUPHRATES RIVER, TO BE EVENTUALLY SHARED WITH THE OTHER RIPARIANS IN A PROPORTION STILL TO BE DEFINED, HAVE A LARGE, YET UNDEVELOPED POTENTIAL FOR IRRIGATION.

SINCE THE EARLY SIXTIES THE GOVERNMENT INCLUDED AMONG THE MAJOR ELEMENTS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY THE IMPROVEMENT OF INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN AGRICULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRRIGATION AND INTENSIVE CULTIVATION WITH A VIEW TO INCREASING AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, INCOMES, PRODUCTION AND EXPORTS WHILE REDUCING IMPORT REQUIREMENTS AND THE DEPENDENCY ON WEATHER FLUCTUATIONS. THE AGRARIAN REFORM WAS EXTENSIVE, INVOLVING THE REDISTRIBUTION OF ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE COUNTRY'S CULTIVATED LAND. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAM ON THE EUPHRATES RIVER SET THE BASIS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.

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BY 1970, SOME OF THE MAIN CONSTRAINTS TO THE GROWTH OF PRODUCTION DURING THE SIXTIES WERE EASED BY THE COMPLETION OF LAND REDISTRIBUTION, BY INCREASING CREDIT, USE OF FERTILIZERS AND BASIC MECHANIZATION, AND BY INTRODUCING HIGH YIELDING VARIETIES OF WHEAT AND NEW DISEASE RESISTANT VARIETIES OF COTTON. A SUSTAINED EFFORT IS STILL REQUIRED, HOWEVER, TO BRING TO YIELD THE MEASURES INTRODUCED SO FAR AND THE INVESTMENT IN THE

EUPHRATES DAM.

THE THIRD PLAN 1971-75 GIVES HIGH PRIORITY TO AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, WITH THE ALLOCATION OF ABOUT 35 PERCENT (\$570 MILLION) OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT TO AGRICULTURE, MOSTLY IN THE EUPHRATES BASIN. SYRIA RECEIVES ASSISTANCE FROM UNDP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIVESTOCK, RURAL COOPERATIVES AND INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

3. 1974 GRAINS AND COTTON SITUATION: FAVORABLE RAINS DURING THE LATTER PART OF 1973 AND EARLY 1974 ENCOURAGED SYRIAN GRAIN FARMERS TO PLANT AN ESTIMATED 1.5 MILLION HECTARES OF WHEAT AND ABOUT 900,000 HECTARES OF BARLEY. SYRIA'S EXPANDING USE OF HIGHYIELDING WHEAT VARIETIES RESULTED IN 224,000 HECTARES PLANTED FOR THE 1973/74 CROP. THE RAINS STOPPED IN APRIL AND HOT DESERT WINDS SET IN WHICH CAUSED PROSPECTIVE GRAIN YIELDS TO FALL SHARPLY. THE WHEAT CROP NOW ESTIMATED AT SLIGHTLY OVER ONE MILLION METRIC TONS, WAS ABOUT HALF THE SIZE OF THE VERY OPTIMISTIC FORECASTS MADE BEFORE THE RAINS STOPPED.

THE 1974 COTTON CROP NOW ESTIMATED AT 378,000 METRIC TONS OF SEED COTTON, IS OFF 7 PERCENT DUE TO A REDUCTION IN THE IRRIGATED COTTON ACREAGE. MUCH OF THE LAND LOST WAS DUE TO FLOODING OF WATERS BEHIND THE EUPHRATES DAM. A SHORTAGE OF PHOSPHATE FERTILIZERS IS EXPECTED TO REDUCE POTENTIAL YIELDS. THE ENTIRE 1974 COTTON CROP WAS PLANTED TO ALEPPO I, A NEW DISEASE RESISTANT VARIETY OF COTTON DEVELOPED BY DR. A. SHAMI OF THE COTTON BUREAU. THE USDA THROUGH THE ATTACHE'S OFFICE IN BEIRUT HAS MAINTAINED CLOSE CONTACTS WITH THE COTTON BUREAU FOR SEVERAL YEARS. THE USDA HAS PROVIDED U.S. SEED TO THE BUREAU FOR FIELD TESTING IN SYRIA, AND ALEPPO I IS BEING FIELD TESTED THIS YEAR AT THE USDA COTTON RESEARCH STATION AT SHAFTER, CALIFORNIA.

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GROWING CONDITIONS FOR OTHER MAJOR CROPS WERE ABOUT NORMAL DURING 1974 FOLLOWING THE SEVERE DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN 1973 WHICH RESULTED IN POOR PASTURES AND A REDUCTION OF SHEEP AND GOAT NUMBERS.

4. AGRICULTURAL TRADE: THE TOTAL VALUE OF SYRIAN IMPORTS DURING 1973 WAS \$642 MILLION, 27 PERCENT OF WHICH WERE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. SYRIA'S EXPORTS IN 1973 AMOUNTED TO \$367 MILLION OF GOODS, OF WHICH 58 PERCENT WERE AGRICULTURAL ITEMS. THE VALUE OF COTTON EXPORTS ALONE ACCOUNTED FOR 34 PERCENT OF 1973'S EXPORTS. THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN A MINOR TRADING PARTNER PROVIDING SOME \$24 MILLION OF SYRIA'S IMPORTS AND TAKING \$2.7 MILLION OF HER EXPORTS IN 1973, NEARLY 4 PERCENT AND LESS THAN ONE PERCENT RESPECTIVELY. TOBACCO PRODUCTS ARE THE MAJOR ITEM TRADED, WITH U.S. UNMANUFACTURED TOBACCO ACCOUNTING FOR NEARLY

54 PERCENT OF SYRIA'S TOBACCO IMPORTS AND THE UNITED STATES
THE DESTINATION FOR 63 PERCENT OF SYRIA'S LEAF TOBACCO EXPORTS.

SYRIA'S AGRICULTURAL IMPORTS IN 1973 CONSISTED MAINLY OF
SUGAR, RICE, BUTTER, WHEAT, ORANGES, TEA AND COFFEE, WHEAT
FLOUR, HIDES AND SKINS AND TOBACCO. IN ADDITION TO COTTON,
THE MAJOR EXPORTS WERE WOOL, WHEAT, SHEEP, HIDES AND SKINS,
PULSES, SPICES AND TOBACCO.

ACCORDING TO U.S. DATA, TRADE WITH SYRIA DURING THE FIRST

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INFO OCT-01 NEA-06 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 SY-04 USSS-00

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EIGHTS MONTHS OF 1974 REVEAL THE SAME TRENDS--90 PERCENT OF
THE U.S. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS EXPORTED WERE UNMANUFACTURED
TOBACCO, AND 77 PERCENT OF U.S. IMPORTS OF SYRIAN AGRICULTURAL
GOODS WERE TOBACCO LEAF. AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS TO SYRIA TOTALLED
\$2.9 MILLION, WITH U.S. VEGETABLE AND OTHER SEEDS BEING THE
NEXT MOST IMPORTANT ITEM. ON THE IMPORT SIDE, SYRIAN AGRI-
CULTURAL PRODUCTS VALUED AT \$1 MILLION WERE RECEIVED, WITH SHEEP-
SKINS, APRICOT PRODUCTS AND CHICKPEAS THE OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS.

5. SYRIA'S AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES: BY FAR THE
MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY IS THE EUPHRATES PROJECT WHICH WHEN

COMPLETED WILL PROVIDE WATER FOR IRRIGATING 640,000 HECTARES, OR MORE THAN DOUBLE SYRIA'S PRESENT IRRIGATED AREA. THE CELEBRATION MARKING THE DIVERSION OF THE EUPHRATES TOOK PLACE JULY 5, 1973 WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE COFFERDAM. THE EUPHRATES DAM WAS BUILT WITH CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE USSR. SEVERAL GOVERNMENTS (ROMANIA, BULGARIA, JAPAN'S IMPORT-EXPORT BANK) AND INTERNATIONAL LENDING AGENCIES (IBRD), IDA) ARE PARTICIPATING IN THE FINANCING AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE NUMEROUS IRRIGATION WORKS AND LAND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES. THE DAM WILL HELP TO CONTROL FLOODING OF THE EUPHRATES AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EVENTUALLY WILL GENERATE CONSIDERABLE ELECTRICITY FOR SYRIAN INDUSTRY AND RURAL USE.

SYRIA IS BUILDING A NATIONAL NETWORK OF SILOS WITH STORAGE CAPACITY FOR OVER 8000,000 METRIC TONS OF GRAIN. CNSTRUCTION ON THE ORIGINAL PROJECT FOR 344,000 TONS OF STORAGE WAS STARTED MAY 1972, AND THE FIRST SITE TO BE INAUGURATED, THE 40,000 TON ALEPPO SILOS, IS EXPECTED BEFORE YEAR END. THIS PROJECT WHICH WAS RECENTLY EXPANDED TO MORE THAN DOUBLE STORAGE CAPACITY ALSO INCLUDES FEED MIXING PLANTS, SEED WAREHOUSES, AND SEED CLEANING, TESTING, AND STORAGE CENTERS. FINANCING FOR THE ORIGINAL PROJECT IS PROVIDED BY THE KUWAITI DEVELOPMENT FUND.

A MAJOR DAIRY PROJECT IS JUST GETING STARTED TO EXPAND MILK PRODUCTION TO HELP MEET THE COUNTRY'S DAIRY PRODUCT NEEDS WITH LESS DEPENDENCE IM IMPORTS. THIS \$27 MILLION PROJECT IS BEING HANDLED BY A CANADIAN FIRM (CANEXPO MARKETING LTD.) AND INVOLVES THE CONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT, STOCKING AND MANAGING OF 10 STATE DAIRY FARMS, 3 FARMS FOR RAISING REPLACEMENT HEIFERS AND FATTENING VEAL CALVES, 3 DAIRIES, AND AN ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION CENTER. CANEXPO WILL PROVIDE ABOUT 8,000 NORTH AMERICAN HOSTEIN CATTLE WHICH WILL BE SHIPPED FROM THE UNITED STATES WITH THE FIRST SHIPMENT EXPECTED MAY/JUNE 1975. THIS YEAR THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRARIAN REFORM CONTRACTED FOR 3,500 HOLSTEIN CATTLE FROM DENMARK, HOLLAND AND WEST GERMANY, TO REPLENISH HERDS ON STATE FARMS AND FOR DISTRIBUTION TO PRIVATE FARMERS.

THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES INCLUDING ROMANIA, BULGARIA AND HUNGARY TO HELP DEVELOP THE POULTRY INDUSTRY. ALSO, THE NORTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT IS PROVIDING \$3.8 MILLION FOR FINANCING 5 STATE POULTRY FARMS FOR HATCHING EGGS AND CHICKS. A CONTRACT HAS BEEN SIGNED WITH AN ITALIAN FIRM FOR A 50 MILLION EGGS A YEAR POULTRY PROJECT COSTING ABOUT \$5 MILLION.

ALSO, THERE ARE SEVERAL LIVESTOCK PROJECTS TO EXPAND MEAT

PRODUCTION. THE SYRIANS HAVE DISCUSSED A JOINT PROJECT WHICH THE IRANIANS WILL FINANCE INVOLVING MEAT PRODUCTION, MOSTLY FOR EXPORT TO IRAN. THE OFFICIAL ROMANIAN AGENCY ROMAGRIMEX HAS AGREED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO HELP SYRIA ESTABLISH 10 STATE CATTLE FARMS.

6. WORLD FOOD PROGRAM (WFP) -58;8583 : WFP COMMITMENTS FOR WFP-ASSISTED PROJECTS IN SYRIA SINCE 1964 HAVE TOTALED MORE THAN \$45 MILLION, WITH OVER 75 PERCENT OF THESE ACTIVITIES OF AN AGRICULTURAL OR RURAL DEVELOPMENT NATURE. THE UNITED STATES HAS NOT MADE COMMODITY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THESE WFP ACTIVITIES SINCE 1967. THE MAJOR WFP ACTIVITY (15.6 MILLION) INVOLVED WITH THE EUPHRATES DAM CONSTRUCTION AND BASIN DEVELOPMENT TERMINATES IN 1975. THE UNITED STATES IS BEING ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE 54,130 METRIC TONS OF WHEAT AND 4,050 TONS OF VEGETABLE OIL FOR A NEW WFP-ASSISTED PROJECT IN THE EUPHRATES BASIN WHICH COMPLIMENTS THE \$73 MILLION IBRD/IDA SUPPORT TO THE BALIKH IRRIGATION PROJECT. FYI THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS ALSO BEING ASKED TO PROVIDE 2,880 TONS OF WHEAT AND 216 TONS OF EDIBLE OIL FOR A QUASI-EMERGENCY PROJECT FOR REHABILITATION OF LIBERATED AREAS IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS END FYI.

7. ARAB ARID ZONE AND DRYLAND RESEARCH CENTER: A FAIRLY NEW ARID LAND RESEARCH CENTER UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE ARAB LEAGUE HAS LOCATED IN DAMASCUS. THIS INSTITUTION SOLICITS FUNDS FROM INDIVIDUAL ARAB COUNTRIES, BUT SO FAR CONSISTS OF A SMALL OFFICE STAFF HEADED BY A SYRIAN, DR. MOHAMMAD EL-KHASH. PRESENTLY IT IS CONTRACTING RESEARCH PROJECTS WITH VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD. IT WILL CONCENTRATE ITS INVESTIGATIONS IN DESERT AGRICULTURE.

8. FORD FOUNDATION: FORD FOUNDATION ACTIVITIES IN SYRIA HAS INCLUDED SUPPORT TO THE AGRICULTURAL FACULTY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALEPPO SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 1962 IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET IT ORGANIZED ALONG U.S. LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY LINES. ALSO DURING THE EARLY 1960'S THE FOUNDATION PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE LABORATORY EQUIPMENT TO THE SYRIAN COTTON BUREAU AND WORKED WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE'S EXTENSION SERVICE.

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WERE CUT OFF BY THE SYRIANS IN 1967. THE FOUNDATION'S ARID LANDS AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (ALAD) PROGRAM TECHNICIANS MAINTAINED INFORMAL CONTACTS WITH THEIR SYRIAN COUNTERPARTS, PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM FOR EXPANDING USE OF HIGH YIELDING WHEAT VARIETIES. IN EARLY 1974 THE UNIVERSITY OF ALEPPO CONTACTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE FOUNDATION TO ARRANGE USE OF FUNDS ALREADY ALLOCATED TO SYRIA. THE UNIVERSITY'S AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL WITH AN ENROLLMENT OF SOME 1500 STUDENTS, AND 50 STAFF PARTLY U.S. TRAINED, WILL BE RECEIVING THESE FUNDS FOR FACULTY RESEARCH.

9. PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE MIDDLE EAST: THE PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN DRY AREAS (ICARDA) IS EXPECTED TO BE LOCATED SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE CREATION OF ICARDA HAS BEEN RECOMMENDED BY THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC) OF THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (CG-IAR). THE U.S. GOVERNMENT (USAID) IS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE INTERNATIONAL CENTERS (6 ALREADY OPERATING AND 4 ON PAPER), ALONG WITH 29 GOVERNMENTS AND AID GIVING AGENCIES (UNDP, FORD AND ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION, ETC.).

THE TAC HAS RECOMMENDED A MIDDLE EAST SITE FOR ICARDA, WITH A PREFERENCE GIVEN TO LOCATION IN LEBANON'S BEKA'A VALLEY. ICARDA WILL HAVE OUT STATIONS IN THE HIGH COLD PLATEAU AREA (IRAN OR TURKEY), IN THE TRUE MEDITERRANEAN AREA (NORTH AFRICA) AND A SHEEP AND LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT STATION PROBABLY IN SYRIA. ICARDA IS EXPECTED TO START OPERATING JANUARY 1976, AND IN TIME MAY BECOME THE WORLD CENTER ON BARLEY IMPROVEMENT. IT WILL ALSO CONCENTRATE ON FOOD LEGUMES SUCH AS CHICKPEAS, BROAD BEANS AND LENTILS.

LEBANON IS THE PREFERRED SITE BECAUSE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF EXCELLENT AIR COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE REGION AND SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT (AUB). ALSO THE BEKA'A IS A GOOD LOCATION FOR DUPLICATING VARIOUS MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS. ICARDA WILL NOT BE JUST AN ARAB INSTITUTION AS ITS INTERESTS EXTEND FROM PAKISTAN TO MOROCCO AND FROM TURKEY TO THE SUDAN. FYI THE U.S. GOVERNMENT POSITION IS TO SUPPORT THE CREATION OF ICARDA, PROVIDING WE CAN SEE ENOUGH MONEY TO OPERATE IT. NO OPEC CONTRY CONTRIBUTES TO CG-IAR FUNDING.

SINCE THERE ARE STILL SEVERAL IFS INVOLVED BEFORE ICARDA BECOMES A REALITY, SECRETARY BUTZ MAY FIND THAT DURING DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIAN OFFICIALS HIS SUPPORT WILL BE SOLICITED TO SEE THAT SYRIA IS CHOSEN FOR ITS LOCATION. END FYI.
GODLEY

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